

Message Text

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FM AMCONSUL BELFAST

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1145

INFO AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY LONDON

USNAVCOMMSTA LONDONDERRY

UNCLAS BELFAST 009

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, U.K. (N.I.)

SUBJECT: MIXED REACTION ULSTER TO FURTHER BRITISH INITIATIVES
ON SECURITY

REF: BELFAST 8

1. NEWS THAT PRIME MINISTER HAS (A) ORDERED ELEMENTS OF SPECIAL AIR SERVICE (SAS) INTO ULSTER, PRESUMABLY FOR DUTY IN SOUTH ARMAGH, AND (B) CONVENED ALL-PARTY DISCUSSION ON SECURITY IN ULSTER, WAS MET WITH MIXED REACTION HERE. LOYALISTS GREETED INTRODUCTION OF SAS AS A SIGN OF NEW AND WELCOME DETERMINATION ON PART GOVERNMENT TO CRUSH TERRORISM SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC AND LABOUR PARTY (SDLP) AND MODERATE ALLIANCE PARTY EXPRESSED RESERVATIONS. SPOKESMAN FOR PROVISIONAL SINN FEIN AND OLD-LINE REPUBLICAN FRANK MCMANUS HOSTILE. ALL-PARTY TALKS TO BE HELD AT 10 DOWNING STREET WILL FIRST ENCOMPASS LABOR, CONSERVATIVE, LIBERAL REPRESENTATIVES AND SPOKESMEN FOR ULSTER GROUPS AT WESTMINSTER - IN EFFECT GERRY FITT FOR SDLP AND JAMES MOLYNEAUX FOR UNITED ULSTER UNIONIST COALITION (UUUC). THERE SOME SUSPICION OF "GIMMICKRY" AND "COSMETICS" VOICED BY ULSTER POLITICIANS TO THIS INITIATIVE.

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2. ULSTER UNIONISTS WELCOME INTRODUCTION OF SAS FIRST AS SIGN THAT IT FINALLY GOVERNMENT POLICY TO END TERRORISM. THE MANY DETRACTORS OF SECSTATE REES SEE IT AS A REPUDIATION OF HIS POLICIES. IT CAN ALSO BE ARGUED THAT IT CONSISTENT WITH REES PROMISE TO RESPOND TO LEVEL OF VIOLENCE. SECOND, THERE POPULAR BELIEF AMONG ULSTER UNIONISTS THAT SAS BEST UNIT TO DEAL WITH TERRORISTS PARTICULARLY IN SOUTH ARMAGH TERRAIN. THIS BOLSTERED BY RECENT NEWSPAPER ARTICLES ATTRIBUTED TO UNIDENTIFIED ARMY OFFICER WITH PREVIOUS SERVICE IN ULSTER WHO RECOMMENDED USE OF SAS IN SOUTH ARMAGH. SDLP AND ALLIANCE SPOKESMEN HOWEVER APPREHENSIVE THAT SAS METHODS WILL ALIENATE SOME ELEMENTS COUNTY ARMAGH POPULACE WHO NOW INCREASINGLY DISPOSED COOPERATE WITH ROYAL ULSTER CONSTABULARY. SEAMUS LOUGHRAN OF PROVISIONAL SINN FEIN SEES "MORE FOREIGN TROOPS IN AN AREA WHICH NEEDS THEM LIKE I NEED A HOLE IN THE HEAD," AND FRANK MCMANUS, FERMANAGH DOES NOT SEE LOGIC IN SENDING IN SAS TO REDUCE ASSASSINATIONS "SINCE ONE OF THE THINGS WE ARE TOLD IS THAT THEY ARE HIGHLY TRAINED IN ASSASSINATION THEMSELVES."

3. THERE LESS OBVIOUS DIVISION IN REACTIONS TO ALL-PARTY SECURITY TALKS. SOME UNIONISTS WELCOMED ANY STEP TO END TERRORISM BUT HOPED IT NOT SIMPLY "WINDOW-DRESSING" EXERCISE BY BRITISH GOVERNMENT. GERRY FITT OF SDLP IN CAUTIOUS STATEMENT SAID HE DID NOT SEE ANYTHING NEW BUT WOULD HAVE TO WAIT AND SEE. LOYALISTS PROBABLY SUSPICIOUS THAT SECURITY TALKS COULD BE FORUM FOR GOVERNMENT TO INTRODUCE PROPOSALS FOR COALITION GOVERNMENT IN NORTHERN IRELAND (SEPTEL).

4. SAS, KNOWN LOCALLY AS "THE FRIGHTENERS", IS MYSTERY BODY IN SIX YEAR HISTORY OF "TROUBLES". ROBERT FISK, FORMERLY BELFAST CORRESPONDENT OF LONDON TIMES PURSUED STORY OF SAS PRESENCE ALMOST AS A HOBBY. THERE ARE MANY RUMORS AND ALLEGATIONS OF PREVIOUS SAS ACTIVITIES BUT BRITISH HAVE CONSISTENTLY DENIED PRESENCE OF ACTIVE UNITS. IT IS BELIEVED THAT IF SAS OPERATED PREVIOUSLY IN NORTHERN IRELAND IT WAS IN INTELLIGENCE ROLE AND LARGELY THROUGH ADVISORS OR SPECIALISTS DETAILED TO OTHER ARMY UNITS. IT ALSO BELIEVED PROVISIONAL IRA AND OTHER PARAMILITARIES HAVE HEALTHY RESPECT FOR SAS AND UNCLASSIFIED

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PRESENCE THAT UNIT IN SOUTH ARMAGH COULD BE EFFECTIVE
DETERRENT TO FURTHER TERRORISM.

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